

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-15 SAJ-01

SAM-01 ACDA-10 OMB-01 MC-02 EB-07 /090 W

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R 161539Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2917

SECDEF

INFO USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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DEFENSE FOR DSAA FOR FISH/VIOLETTE

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: MARR, MASS, MILI, US, UK, NATO

SUBJ: ARMS DEBATE IN COMMONS

1. IN A DEBATE THAT NOT EVEN THE PARTICIPANTS WOULD
LIKELY CLAIM TO BE DISTINGUISHED, THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
ON JULY 8 ADDRESSED WHAT THE GUARDIAN (LEANING TOWARD
LIBERAL) HEADLINED AS "MPS DEBATE MORALITY AND REALITIES
OF ARMS TRADE" AND THE TIMES (LEANING TOWARD CONSERVATIVE
HEADLINED AS "DEFENSE SALES ORGANIZATION DESERVES PRO-
TECTION IN FACE OF INNUENDO". JULIAN CRITCHLEY (CONSER-
VATIVE) OPENED THE DEBATE BY SAYING THAT THOSE WHO SUG-
GESTED ARMS SALES WERE IMMORAL AND A DIRTY BUSINESS
SHOULD LIVE IN THE WORLD AS IT EXISTED AND NOT AS THEY
WOULD LIKE IT TO BE. WITHOUT LARGE EXPORT ORDERS TO REDUCE
UNIT COSTS THE VIABILITY OF AN INDEPENDENT BRITISH ARMS
INDUSTRY AND A BASE FOR ADVANCED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
WOULD BE AT RISK. "WE NEED TO SELL ARMS IN ORDER TO BUY
OUR OWN DEFENSE ECONOMICALLY..." HE SAID. THE APPETITE
FOR MODERN ARMS WAS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO SATISFY. THE
MIDDLE EAST WAS EXPERIENCING AN ARMS RACE OF MEMORABLE
PROPORTIONS. UNRESTRICTED ARMS SALES TO THE MIDDLE EAST
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COULD ONLY WORK IN FAVOR OF THE ARABS WHO HAD MORE MONEY,

MORE MANPOWER AND MORE FRIENDS. BRITAIN NEEDED TO EXPORT ARMS AND TO SEEK SECURITY. IF BRITAIN DID NOT SELL ARMS OTHERS WOULD. BUT IF OTHERS DID NOT, THE BUYER COUNTRIES WOULD EVENTUALLY MAKE ARMS THEMSELVES. PERHAPS THE WAY OUT OF THE DILEMMA LAY IN EUROPE. BY RATIONALIZATION LEADING TO STANDARDIZATION AND SPECIALIZATION BRITAIN COULD SAVE VAST SUMS OF MONEY AND SELL MORE OF ITS ARMS TO ITS EUROPEAN ALLIES AND TO THE UNITED STATES THAN IT COULD ELSEWHERE. A EUROPEAN ARMS PROCUREMENT AGENCY COULD OFFER A MEANS OF PRODUCING ARMS MORE EFFICIENTLY AND CONTROLLING ARMS EXPORTS TO THIRD PARTIES.

2. SPEAKING FOR THE GOVERNMENT, MR. WILLIAM RODGERS (MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENSE, LABOR) SAID THREE ISSUES WERE INVOLVED -- THE ACCEPTABILITY OF THE TRADE, TO WHOM ARMS SHOULD BE SOLD, AND HOW EFFECTIVELY THE ARMS SALES BUSINESS COULD BE CONDUCTED WITHIN THE POLICY LAID DOWN. RODGERS SAID HE RECOGNIZED THAT TO A NUMBER OF PEOPLE THE ARMS TRADE WAS DISTASTEFUL. "I FULLY RECOGNIZE IT IS A DISTASTEFUL BUSINESS TO A NUMBER OF PEOPLE, AND I RESPECT THE VIEWS OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE IT IS IMMORAL", HE SAID, "...PROVIDED THIS MEANS IMMORAL FOR EVERYONE AND NOT ONLY FOR OURSELVES". HOWEVER HE DOUBTED WHETHER MOST PEOPLE SAW THE ISSUE IN THAT WAY. HE FELT MOST BELIEVED IT WAS REASONABLE TO SELL ARMS TO PARTNERS IN AN ALLIANCE SINCE THAT WAS STRENGTHENING MUTUAL SECURITY. THE REALITY OF INTERNATIONAL LIFE WAS THAT NATIONAL SELF-DENIAL IN SUCH TRADE DID NOT MEAN THE END OF ARMS SALES. BUT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE TO PUT ITS FULL WEIGHT BEHIND DISARMAMENT ON AN INTERNATIONAL BASIS AND TO SUPPORT ANY WORTHWHILE INITIATIVE IN THE UNITED NATIONS OR ELSEWHERE WHICH WOULD RESULT IN INTERNATIONALLY AGREED RESTRAINTS ON THE ARMS TRADE WITH A VIEW TO REDUCING IT. SUCCESSIVE GOVERNMENTS HAD BEEN ALERT TO THE PARTICULAR PROBLEM OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT, HE SAID, SEEK TO ENCOURAGE THE ARMS RACE THERE.

3. REFERRING TO THE DEFENSE SALES ORGANIZATION, RODGERS NOTED THAT IT WAS ESTABLISHED NINE YEARS AGO, AND NOW EMPLOYED "SOME 350 PEOPLE, WITH AN ADMINISTRATIVE COST IN UNCLASSIFIED

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THE CURRENT FINANCIAL YEAR OF JUST UNDER 3 MILLION POUNDS. THE ESTIMATED VALUE OF SALES LAST YEAR WAS 475 MILLION POUNDS, AND FOR 1975-76 IT IS 560 MILLION POUNDS". AT LEAST 70,000 TO 80,000 JOBS WERE INVOLVED.

4. THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION WERE CLEARLY WELL AHEAD OF THE UNITED KINGDOM IN ARMS SALES. AS FOR FRANCE, RODGERS NOTED THAT THEY MADE A GREAT SONG AND

DANCE ABOUT THEIR SUCCESS WHILE THE UNITED KINGDOM MAINTAINED A LOW PROFILE. THERE WAS NO REAL EVIDENCE THAT FRANCE WAS DOING BETTER THAN TO TAKE FOURTH PLACE BEHIND THE UK.

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5. THE DEFENSE SALES ORGANIZATION WAS HIGHLY PROFESSIONAL. RODGERS DID NOT THINK MPS SHOULD ALLOW SUCH ENTHUSIASM AS THERE MAY BE FOR DEFENSE SALES "TO LEAD US INTO BUILDING A SALES ORGANIZATION WHICH DOES NOT MAINTAIN ITS OWN INTEGRITY", HE SAID. "IN THE LONG RUN IT IS A MISTAKE TO SELL CUSTOMERS WHAT THEY DO NOT WANT, WHAT THEY CANNOT USE, OR WHAT THEY CANNOT PAY FOR. ARMS SALES SHOULD NOT BE THE PROVINCE OF 'WIDE BOYS'."

6. RODGERS WAS PREPARED TO BELIEVE THAT THE DEFENSE SALE ORGANIZATION HAD ITS FAILURES, BUT HE WOULD REGRET WINKS AND NODS ON PRIVATE OCCASIONS THAT IMPLIED SHORTCOMINGS IN THE ORGANIZATION WITHOUT SPECIFYING THEM. IF MPS HAD SPECIFIC CRITICISMS, HE HOPED THEY WOULD MAKE THEM PLAINLY

SO THAT THEY WOULD BE CAREFULLY INVESTIGATED. THE DEFENSE SALES ORGANIZATION WAS PART OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE AND WAS RIGHTLY OPEN TO THE PROCEDURES OF THE COMMONS, BUT THE ORGANIZATION DESERVED "MINISTERIAL PROTECTION IN THE FACE OF GENERALIZED CRITICISM OR INNUENDO".

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7. THE MATTER OF RAPIER CAME UP AND RODGERS SAID THAT ALTHOUGH RAPIER DID NOT MEET US REQUIREMENTS "THAT WAS NOT TO SAY IT WAS NOT AN EXCELLENT WEAPON". TO ASSUME THAT IT WAS A FAILURE OF TOP LEVEL UNITED KINGDOM SUPPORT WHICH RESULTED IN THE UNITED STATES DECISION, WAS FRANKLY NAIVE.

8. COMMENT: IT IS CLEAR FROM THE COMMONS DEBATE THAT FEW MPS REALLY KNEW MUCH ABOUT THE COMPLEXITIES AND NUANCES UNDERLYING MANY, IF NOT ALL, OF THE MAJOR DECISIONS AFFECTING ARMS SALES, PARTICULARLY THE EVEN MORE COMPLEX NUTS AND BOLTS SIDE OF "INDUSTRIAL PARTICIPATION". THERE WAS A TIME, NOT SO LONG AGO, WHEN THE KIND OF SUBJECT MATTER INVOLVED IN DEFENSE SALES WOULD HAVE GENERATED T HEATED CLASHES BETWEEN MINISTERS, SHADOW MINISTERS AND BACKBENCHERS. TODAY, HOWEVER, ISSUES OF DEFENSE ARE NO LONGER AT THE CENTER OF POLITICS IN BRITAIN. CERTAINLY, IT IS NOT FOR WANT OF ISSUES OF GREAT IMPORTANCE THAT THE DEBATE ON ARMS SALES WAS SO LACKING IN STYLE, PERSUASIONS, CONVICTIONS AND SUBSTANCE.

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9. THIS YEAR THE UNITED STATES AT ANY RATE ESCAPED RELATIVELY UNSCATHED FROM THE DARTS AND ARROWS OF LEFT-WING OUTRAGE AT "HIGH POWERED AMERICAN SALESMANSHIP" AND "THE MORE DUBIOUS SALESMANSHIP PRACTICES" TO WHICH THE AMERICAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY IS SUPPOSEDLY ACCUSTOMED AND OF WHICH IT IS OFTEN ERRONEOUSLY ACCUSED.

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